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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000809

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [HO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [VE](#) [EFIN](#)  
SUBJECT: TOP HONDURAN PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDER PEPE LOBO ON  
ALBA, POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

REF: A. A: TEGUCIGALPA 795  
[1](#)B. B: TEGUCIGALPA 799

Classified By:  
Charge d' Affaires, a.i., Simon Henshaw, reasons 1.4 (b  
& d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The former and presumptive 2009 Nationalist Party candidate for President Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo made an introductory call on Charge August 27, accompanied by Fred Breve, former Defense Minister in the Maduro administration. Lobo and Breve expressed concerns about both the upcoming elections in El Salvador and Honduras; their views on ALBA as a means to fund the remainder of the Zelaya administration while providing cover for Venezuelan and Cuban intelligence to infiltrate Honduras; and touched on Lobo's plan for governing. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Lobo said that the outcome of elections in El Salvador could compound the high emotions in Honduras around primary time. He noted that if the FMLN were to win in El Salvador, Honduras could be the United States' last ally in the region. Lobo noted that in Honduras, President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya was trying to create a climate of confusion and disorder in the lead-up to the November 2008 party primaries and November 2009 presidential election. Although Zelaya is ineligible for re-election under Honduran law, Lobo expressed concern that Zelaya efforts to create political chaos could be aimed at ultimately declaring a state of emergency and holding on to power beyond the end of his term. He said Zelaya could do so under "a thousand pretexts."

[1](#)3. (C) Charge questioned whether Zelaya had sufficient political, popular or military support to succeed at such an attempt, and Lobo acknowledged that he did not. Lobo agreed that Zelaya has alienated his own party and has little support from the military, except Chief of Defense General Vasquez, whom he kept on beyond mandatory retirement to the chagrin of the other top brass. Despite concerted efforts to build up grassroots popular support through his "People's Power" movement, he has been unable to garner widespread popular support, and has seen his polling numbers decline dramatically. This was demonstrated by the poor and indifferent turnout at the August 25 ALBA signing ceremony (Ref A). Lobo opined that the ALBA event drove Zelaya's

public image to an all-time low. However, he said Zelaya is surrounded by a circle of hard-left advisors, led by Liberal Party President Patricia "Paty" Rodas, and this group of "Patricios," as they are called in the Honduran press, are not keen on relinquishing power.

14. (C) Lobo added that signing ALBA was Zelaya's effort to keep the GOH afloat economically to the end of his term (Ref B) and enable Venezuelan and Cuban intelligence agents to flow into Honduras under the guise of educational and medical assistance.

15. (C) On a more administrative level, Lobo expressed concern over the state of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), the body responsible for conducting the elections. He noted the greatest risk of fraud would be in the transmission of results, and despite having a full budget at its disposal, the TSE has not purchased any of the equipment or set forth the plan necessary to transmit the results and thus create confidence in the electoral process.

16. (C) Charge reassured Lobo that the top priority of the Mission during the elections was that they proceed freely and transparently, and that there be a peaceful transition to a new administration chosen by the Honduran people. Charge stated that the Mission would put to use all its resources to support that end, at the same time maintaining a close relationship with the current administration, stressing that since Zelaya had only 16 months left in his term, the most dangerous thing would be for Zelaya to feel isolated.

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17. (SBU) Lobo articulated his security plan if he is elected, which would be to create a security "super-ministry." The new ministry would be akin to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and would coordinate police, customs and border controls, and migration.

18. (C) Comment: Lobo's concern that Zelaya may not be willing to relinquish power at the end of his term is common in political circles of Tegucigalpa, but he was quite pragmatic in his views, acknowledging that the Zelaya administration is not working from a position of strength. Another view is that Zelaya's ultimate goal is merely to prevent his own prosecution once out of office by repeatedly creating a climate of concern over his intentions, then negotiating his way out of danger. Zelaya lacks the political, military and social leverage of his ALBA counterparts. Nonetheless, the political process will be at greater risk if Zelaya feels so isolated that he has nothing to lose in attempting to derail elections, and for this reason a strategy of engagement will be increasingly important over the remaining months of his administration. End Comment.

HENSHAW